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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
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ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ITS FOURTEENTH SESSION

Draft report

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V. CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Addendum

Russian Federation

1. The Committee considered the third and fourth periodic reports of the Russian Federation (CEDAW/C/USR/3 and 4) at its 274th meeting, on 26 January 1995.

2. Introducing the fourth periodic report, the representative of the State Party outlined the current economic, political and social situation in the Russian Federation and stressed that the position of women should be viewed within the context of the problems generally encountered in those areas. She stressed the depth and permanent nature of the current reforms in the Russian Federation and their international implications. She also pointed to the high economic and social costs of restructuring and to a whole new set of issues that the Russian Federation has had to deal with in the context of that process. Among the most acute issues were the continuing economic deterioration, the decline in real incomes, the spread of poverty, unemployment, massive migration and a sharp worsening of living standards for what appeared to be the majority of the population. Those problems were further complicated by serious ecological problems and the deterioration of the physical and social infrastructure caused by the sharp decline in capital investment.

3. Poverty had become a widespread and self-perpetuating condition for many strata of the population. There was a real danger of inter-generational transfer of poverty, since many children in poor families, particularly in single-parent households, were faced with a limited opportunity to develop as they lacked books, toys and other aids to intellectual and spiritual growth. Poverty in Russia was becoming increasingly feminized and women comprised 70 per cent of the country's unemployed. The high rate of unemployment among Russian women was primarily due to the rapid restructuring and privatization of industries employing a large proportion of female labour. The majority of unemployed women were highly educated, but the duration of their unemployment was twice as long as that of men. Social tensions, intensified by reform, had led to a resurgence of stereotyping of the role of women and to calls for their return to their "natural functions". Although national machinery for the advancement of women had been established and its functioning had protected women from some of the adverse consequences of reform, it had not as yet been able fully to articulate women's interests so as to affect the course of reform. Women remained debarred from economic and political decision-making.

4. The representative informed the members of the Committee that the Government of the Russian Federation, having realized that the monetarist underpinning of the first wave of economic reform provided only a limited set of social protection measures, had emphasized the provision of a proper level of social protection as the main requirement for the continuation of economic reform. She assured members of the Committee that, in spite of the current economic and political crisis in the Russian Federation and the sharp reduction in the capacity of the State to achieve the goals set by the Convention, the Government remained dedicated to the goals of women's advancement and the elimination of discrimination against them and would continue to take measures directed at alleviating the negative impact of transformation on women and improving their economic and social position.

General observations

5. Members thanked the Government for its report and noted its comprehensive and frank nature. They noted, however, that the fourth periodic report had a number of major weaknesses, among which the following should be mentioned. Firstly, there were few references to specific policies, programmes and activities being undertaken by the Government in connection with the provisions of the Convention. In addition, the limited number of statistics provided did not make it possible to grasp the real dimensions of the situation. Thus, the report was largely theoretical and, to some extent, incomplete in nature. It was rather difficult to assess how the status of women had evolved and what initiatives had been undertaken by the Government since the restructuring of the country had begun.

6. Members expressed concern that the special temporary measures adopted did not cover issues like increasing women's influence in policy or the market economy, their possibilities in higher positions, pay differences and other forms of discrimination in working life and the health situation of women. It seemed to be a fact that poverty in the Russian Federation was a female phenomenon.

7. Members noted with concern that with the end of communism and the introduction of the new system, changes had taken place in the political and economic spheres. While the restructuring process had entailed a series of progressive developments in society as a whole, women were encountering greater disadvantages as a result of the increase in their workload, inadequate child-care services and shrinking job opportunities; social changes were leading to a stratification that went beyond the social plane and was also directly apparent between the sexes. Yet the report said little about the economic crisis and the impact of stabilization and adjustment policies on women. A more detailed explanation should have been given of the way in which the burden of inflation had fallen on women's shoulders and increased their workload, given that the adjustment programmes had caused prices to rise and wages to be frozen, presumably forcing women to forgo certain common services that were formerly available to them.

Questions relating to specific articles

Article 3

8. Responding to a question on national machinery for the coordination of policies dealing with women and on its responsibilities, status and authority, the representative, referring to the fourth periodic report, informed members of the Committee that such machinery, with mandates for women, the family and children, had been established within federal, regional and local governments and that it cooperated with public organizations. A Commission for Women, the Family and Demography had been established in the office of the President of the Russian Federation. The Commission was a collective advisory body for the formulation and coordination of government policy for achieving equal rights and opportunities for men and women. A Committee on Women, the Family and Youth had been established in the State Duma. A Department for Women, the Family and Children's Questions existed within the Ministry of Social Defence. It coordinated State policy on the family, the social equality of women and child development. The Department worked in cooperation with the federal executive and legislative branches of the State. A National Preparatory Council for the Fourth World Conference on Women had been established. It consolidated the efforts of the State and of non-governmental organizations to improve the situation of women and to develop the State's social policy and its legal base.

9. Concerning a question raised on State programmes for the advancement of women, the representative replied that the aim of those programmes was to create conditions for the realization of the principles of equality between men and women in terms of their access to legal rights and freedoms. Such programmes included the provision of support to women candidates for election, the nomination of women as candidates for posts at various levels of the executive and legislative branches, a system of control of the implementation of decisions, and cooperation with the Government and with trade unions and non-governmental organizations. One of the main goals of those programmes was to help women with their family obligations and to achieve an equal distribution of family responsibilities between men and women.

10. Replying to a question on the role of women in economic and social decision-making and the integration of their concerns into economic and social

planning, the representative, referring to the fourth periodic report, informed the Committee that women in the Russian Federation were not adequately represented at the decision-making level. The problems of women's participation in economic and political decision-making had been discussed at a National Conference on Women in Development in December 1994. She further stated that the current strategy for increasing the participation of women in decision-making was directed at the restructuring of the existing system of societal governance by the enactment of the necessary laws, the creation of the necessary conditions and the development of special programmes for the training of women.

11. In reply to questions by members of the Committee concerning the resettlement of refugees, including women, the representative recalled the extent, dimensions and causes of migration in the Russian Federation. She stated that the Federal Migration Service of the Russian Federation had been established in 1991. As of 1 January 1994, 447,900 refugees had been registered, of which women accounted for 53.4 per cent. Refugees received payments equal to the minimum wage and were entitled to interest-free, long-term credit, which had been paid to 6,700 refugee families in 1992 and 1993.

Article 4

12. With regard to special measures to guarantee de facto equality, the representative stated that the law did not allow discrimination on the basis of sex. She also informed them that reform of the legislation of the Russian Federation for purposes of ensuring equality was under way.

Article 5

13. In response to a question on what had been done to ensure that women were fairly portrayed in the media, the representative stated that that issue, among other concerns of women, was systematically addressed by the programmes on State television and radio. The purpose of those programmes was to inform women of their rights and to draw public attention to women's problems. She named a number of popular programmes that addressed women's issues and concerns. She noted, however, that the stereotyping of the role of women and their place in society sometimes took place in the media and in the press.

14. Members of the Committee wanted to know whether the Government made systematic studies of forms of violence directed against women and the consequences of abuse suffered by them. In reply, the representative stated that her Government interpreted violence against women as a violation of their human rights. She provided the Committee with statistics on various forms of violence against women and information on the consequences of such violence for the lives and health of the women subjected to it. In September 1994, the National Preparatory Council for the Fourth World Conference on Women had convened a meeting to discuss the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The National Platform for the Advancement of Women contained a separate section dealing with action for the prevention of violence against women. She also informed the Committee that in 1993, 14,400 rape cases had been registered. In that year, the total number of crimes involving women as victims was 331,800. As a result of those crimes, 14,500 women had died and

56,400 had suffered mutilation or other bodily injury. The representative stated that the legislation of the Russian Federation regarded rape as a criminal offence punishable by long-term imprisonment. She recognized the need for shelters and mentioned the attempt to establish rehabilitation centres for the victims. Attention was given to the identification of the profiles of violators in order to improve the prevention of such crimes. She also said that, in order to combat violence against women, solutions should be found to current economic and social problems, inter-ethnic conflicts and decline in the living standards of the population.

15. Responding to the question concerning the role of the family during the period of transition and the increase of the burden of family responsibilities on women, the representative said that although her Government considered the distribution of family responsibilities as an internal family matter, it nevertheless viewed egalitarian distribution of those responsibilities as desirable and conducted policies directed at the encouragement of equal participation of men and women in parenting and caring for family members. She also stated that the expansion of economic freedom of Russian women would help to liberate them from the everyday burden of domestic work.

Article 6

16. One expert cited an independent non-governmental organization source of information on prostitution in the major cities of the Russian Federation, and requested more information on prostitution and on measures that the Government had taken to address those problems. In response, the representative stated that although it was not appropriate to refer to a source other than the report under discussion, she nevertheless was willing to comment on some aspects of that phenomenon. She referred the Committee to the fourth periodic report, where the legislation dealing with prostitution was described. She stated that the law did not establish criminal liability for prostitution, but corruption of minors, keeping of brothels and procuring for pecuniary gain were considered criminal offences. She also informed members that there was no department in the Russian Federation dealing with prostitution and, therefore, there was no reliable source of information and statistics on that issue. She stated that prostitutes did not undergo any additional medical examination and could be held responsible for their actions only in an administrative way, in other words, they could be fined.

17. The representative stated that the Government did not seek to determine whether marriages between Russian women and foreign citizens were genuine. She also pointed out that because legal illiteracy was quite widespread, it was conceivable that some Russian women could have been taken abroad on fictional contracts. She referred to the fact that the Russian Federation had joined Interpol, which might help to address problems of prostitution and associated criminal acts.

Article 7

18. In response to a question concerning the representation of Russian women in Parliament and the generally undemocratic situation with respect to women's participation in political decision-making, the representative replied that,

after a decrease, there had lately been a notable increase in the activities of women and in their self-confidence. There were now more women leaders in public movements and political parties in the Russian Federation. The political movement "Women of Russia" had been founded in October 1993 and was represented in the Parliament. Its main goal was to promote the socio-political role of Russian women and to advance them to decision-making positions. Although women's representation in the legislative organs of the federal Government had somewhat improved, they were still significantly underrepresented in the upper echelons of federal ministries. In 1995, there were only two women ministers. The strategy for the integration of women in decision-making was directed at the development and implementation of special programmes for the training and promotion of decisive, able and competent women.

19. In her answer to the question concerning measures taken by her Government to ensure that the level of women's representation in public life did not decline, particularly in rural areas, the representative said that legislation in the Russian Federation contained no discriminatory rules limiting the participation of women in the political life of the country. She pointed out that the old system of quotas, although helping to soften the effects of discrimination on women, was an old-fashioned way to address the problem and new methods should be sought. In that respect, she emphasized the greater political participation of women, which was rising. Women's organizations were an integral part of the country's socio-political structure, but many of them were still in the process of being built and were faced with a variety of difficulties. The representative informed members of the Committee that special measures had been formulated to find competent women to stand for election to executive bodies.

Article 10

20. In response to the question on government initiatives to evaluate sexism in the educational system, the representative responded that article 5 of the Education Act of the Russian Federation guaranteed access to education regardless of various factors, including sex. Women in the Russian Federation had equal access with men to higher and technical education with the exception of some occupations where operation of hazardous machinery or performance of physically strenuous tasks were required. Some restrictions on women's participation in those occupations were spelt out in job descriptions. The representative informed the Committee that the proportion of women in higher educational establishments was stable.

Article 11

21. Responding to the question on the high rate of unemployment among Russian women, the representative said that the right to work and the right to non-discriminatory treatment in the labour market were the most difficult and contradictory questions to be addressed under the conditions of the fledgling market economy. She stated that women had accounted for almost 70 per cent of the unemployed in 1993 and explained that it was the result of the restructuring of "women's branches of the economy". She pointed out, however, that the proportion of women among the unemployed was expected to decline to 60 to 65 per cent as the first stage of the reform had now been completed. She also

informed members that the Government had just begun to regulate labour relations under the conditions of a market economy and based its policies on the principles of assistance to the needy and of strengthening conditions for the development of employment opportunities.

22. Regarding discrimination against women in the labour market, the representative informed the Committee that the Government had never stated explicitly or implicitly that women should confine themselves exclusively to matters of family and home-making. At the same time, freedom of expression allowed some journalists and politicians to express their personal views regarding the role of women in the economy and society. She noted that there was unequal treatment of women and men in the private sector, though women who had been discriminated against were free to turn to the courts for the resolution of discrimination cases, even when companies were closing.

23. As regards the disparities in remuneration between men and women, the representative informed the Committee that salaries of women were lower not because of discrimination, but because they were employed in the sectors dependent on the State budget. The average salary of a woman in the Russian Federation was one third lower than that of men. On the other hand, when women held jobs comparable to those of men, they were paid at the same rate.

24. Concerning special treatment given to pregnant women, members asked how the policies of maternity leave and benefits had been implemented under conditions of scarcity. In response, the representative said that such measures had been taken and were discussed in the fourth periodic report.

25. Members of the Committee wished to know the value of family allowances in real terms compared with the period before economic reform. The representative said that the analysis of changes in the real value of family allowances was complicated because of the difference between the purchasing power of the family income and its nominal value. Changes in the structure of allowances constituted the other source of complexity. She informed the Committee that as at the end of 1993, there were several types of allowances available to families with dependent children. The size of the allowance was determined on the basis of the age of dependent children and the number of income-providers in the family. She also informed the Committee that since 1992, families with dependent children were entitled to a tax deduction per dependent child.

Article 12

26. In response to the question on the impact of structural adjustment on the provision of and access to health care by women and children, the representative informed the Committee that access to health care in her country was guaranteed by the Constitution. The health care system was being transformed from a system based on the State budget to one based on private insurance. The State guaranteed access to free health care to women and children.

27. In connection with the question regarding the impact of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) on women in the Russian Federation, the representative said that the Government considered this a priority task and a matter of national security. She informed the

Committee that in January 1994, 264 cases of women with HIV had been registered in the Russian Federation of whom 42 per cent were girls and of whom 33 had been pregnant when diagnosed with the virus. The Government had drafted a law on the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Russian Federation, which was now being considered by legislative organs of the Government.

28. Responding to the question on family planning and the request for recent data on that issue, the representative stated that the Government was financing a federal programme to establish family-planning offices in all medical establishments. The programme aimed at greater availability of contraceptives and a reduction in the number of abortions. She informed the Committee that in 1994 25 family-planning centres were operating throughout the Russian Federation and, as a result of that, the abortion rate had declined to 94 per 1,000 women from 114 per 1,000 in 1990.

Article 14

29. Concerning the impact of fertilizers and pesticides on the health of women farmers and their children, the representative stated that her Government had taken a number of measures directed at improving the life of rural women. Women in rural areas were in some cases entitled to additional benefits. Women below the age of 35 were not allowed to be assigned to work with poisons, pesticides and disinfectants. There was a specific list of occupations and places where women were not allowed to work. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food had developed a programme directed at the introduction of greater automation and reduction of manual work in the areas that were especially harmful to human health.

30. Experts requested some additional information on rural-urban migration involving women. The representative replied that migration from rural areas was caused by the lack of prestigious employment opportunities in those areas. She stressed that unemployment could not be viewed as the single most important cause of migration because women from rural areas had little chance of finding employment in the cities. She also pointed out that migration from rural to urban areas had always been typical for the Russian Federation and in the past had been the result of the urbanization policy.

31. In connection with the question on the marketing infrastructure available to rural women, the representative replied that such infrastructure was at the initial stage of its development. The Government expected that in the future it would be widely accessible to all people employed within the agro-industrial complex.

Article 16

32. One expert commented that, according to various media reports, there had been an alarming increase in the number of homeless children in the Russian Federation. She wanted to know what the reason for that was and what measures had been taken by the Government to address the problem. The representative responded that every year in the Russian Federation 60,000 unsupervised minors were arrested for vagrancy and criminal activity. She informed the Committee that at present there were 59 social rehabilitation centres, 151 orphanages and

5 centres for assistance to children operating in the country. The activities of those institutions were directed at finding caring homes for children without families.

Additional comments and questions

33. Members of the Committee applauded the in-depth, substantive answers provided by the representative in response to questions posed by the Committee. One member expressed her concern about the system of quotas and the fact that the Government seemed to have completely discarded the potential usefulness of quotas as a tool for the facilitation of the advancement of women. She said that she could not see how the Russian Federation could improve women's participation in decision-making without obliging political parties to incorporate women into politics. She further stated that quotas had been used successfully in many countries. She expressed her hope that the creation of women's organizations and the greater involvement of women in politics could help the incorporation of their interests into the economics and politics of the transition.

34. In response to that comment, the representative said that although quotas might be of some use in the facilitation of women's advancement, Russian women felt demeaned by them. She said that her Government saw more opportunities for the improvement of the situation of women in the Russian Federation through encouraging women's political participation. She said that it was essential to get more women involved in the work of women's organizations and political parties.

35. Another expert expressed her concern that women in the Russian Federation, like in many other countries that underwent structural adjustment, were the main victims of the negative effects of the transition process. She said that during the period of transition, Russian women were exposed to discrimination from both the old and the new systems. She further expressed her concern over the feminization of poverty and its devastating consequences. She commented on the segregation of the labour market and expressed her hope that the new system would be able to overcome that impediment to the advancement of women.

36. Another expert was concerned with the resurgence of stereotyping. She pointed out that the stereotyping of the role of women was not addressed under the old system and there existed a real danger of its perpetuation. She stressed the need for addressing women's individual and not just family-related needs. She also expressed her concern about the current internal war in the Russian Federation and its consequences in terms of loss of life and drain of much-needed financial resources.

37. One expert made a comment about the impact of structural adjustment on social services and the deteriorating health of the Russian population. She was especially concerned about widespread illnesses of the lungs, the digestive system and the nervous system among Russian children. She requested more information on the causes of those illnesses, particularly nervous disorders.

38. In response to that comment, the representative cited ecological reasons, poverty and worsening nutritional standards as possible causes of the widespread deterioration in the health of Russian citizens.

39. A comment was made concerning the scope of new social and economic problems that had to be dealt with by the Government in the context of transition. The problems of poverty, the deterioration of the health system and the decline in the provision of social services were mentioned. In that context, the expert expressed her fear that continuation of the reform would lead to further deterioration in standards of living in the country. She felt, however, that there were some positive developments as well. She thought that economic and political crises brought a greater awareness of women's problems and encouraged women's political participation. She advised the Government of the Russian Federation to use the Committee in its efforts to reform the economy and society.

40. One member commented on the need for more special temporary measures to help Russian women achieve full integration of their interests into economic and social policy-making during the period of transition.

41. Another expert expressed her concern about the growing number of prostitutes in the Russian Federation, who operated not only in the Russian Federation but also in other countries where their human rights were constantly violated. She said that there were many Russian prostitutes in Turkey and some of them were infected with HIV. She requested some information on what happened to Russian prostitutes who were deported from Turkey and other countries. She felt that such information was needed for better monitoring of women's human rights.